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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 001475

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KNNP](#) [IR](#) [AM](#)
SUBJECT: WHO WATCHES THE BORDER BETWEEN IRAN AND
AZERBAIJAN'S OCCUPIED TERRITORIES?

Classified By: CDA A.F.Godfrey for reason 1.4 (b, d)

Summary

1. (C) Armenia's border with Iran extends only some 40 kilometers along the Arax river and is patrolled effectively by Russian border guards with Armenian support. Much more opaque, however, is how the 95 kilometer border between Iran and the territories of Azerbaijan now occupied by Armenian and "Nagorno Karabakh Republic" (NKR) forces is patrolled. Russia, as an OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair, has no role or presence in these territories; to be active there would be to violate Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. For the same reason, U.S. assistance programs provide no support to this region. Armenian officials quietly tell us that while smuggling did take place in the mid-1990's, the border is effectively closed down, with (on the northern side) a combination of Armenian Army and Border Guards keeping watch. We have no way to verify this assertion. End Summary.

Armenia's Border with Iran

2. (C) The Arax river, where it forms the northern natural border of Iran with the former Soviet Union, is a rushing, alpine river which runs through deep mountain gorges. Crossings are few; this was also the southern border of the Soviet Union, and was tightly controlled. Formal cross-border cooperation between Iran and Armenia is relatively limited, and the only bridge is at Meghri. Construction equipment carrying out work on the new gas pipeline from Iran to Armenia crosses daily, carrying sections of pipe north. New projects for jointly-owned hydro power stations are on the drawing board, but no construction has begun. Trade is relatively limited, and informal estimates of between 40 - 70 full-size trucks per week are the average.

3. (C) Radiation detectors, installed as part of USG assistance, are well maintained and always on. Other border monitoring equipment, including x-ray machines and networked computers capable of name-checking terrorist databases are fully functional, also thanks largely to USG assistance. On the Armenian side, the border is kept by a well-maintained fence, guard towers and regular patrols. No fence or patrols are visible on the Iran side.

Occupied Territories? Ninety-five KM of Unchecked Border

4. (C) To our knowledge, there is no international monitoring of the border between the Azerbaijani territories occupied by Armenian and "NKR" forces and Iran; any information we have

about this border and the traffic which crosses (or doesn't cross) is based on what we have learned from our Armenian interlocutors. We met recently with Deputy Defense Minister Artur Aghabekian and spoke with Shavarsh Mikaelian, a key official in Armenia's Border Guards, to find out how Armenia -- which must bear responsibility for this territory as occupying power -- manages the more than ninety kilometers of border it shares with Iran. Both men spoke carefully and were in general uncomfortable with the subject. Aghabekian is a key interlocutor for the USG and has great credibility with us on defense reform issues.

15. (C) Aghabekian is a native of Karabakh and is often there.

His rise to his current position was based not on experience in the Soviet Army (he has none), but on his remarkable intellect and his leadership ability during the conflict with Azerbaijan and on complex reform issues after the cease fire.

He told us that while there had been some trade across the border, strong ties were never forged; the population on the Iranian side is largely ethnic Azeri and during the conflict, Armenian commanders believed that Azerbaijani forces were supported by artillery spotters in Iran. After the cease fire, some sporadic trade had taken place, with Iranian diesel fuel and gasoline being swapped by local residents for Armenian vodka. Aghabekian claimed that this trade had stopped; he alleged that the Armenian military presence in the region was more professional and the Ahmadi-Nejad government was less tolerant of the southbound flow of vodka and several would-be smugglers had been shot.

16. (C) Shavarsh Mikaelian, who is responsible for Armenia's border crossings, told us on October 17 that it was Armenia's border guards, together with the Armenian Army, who patrolled the border with Iran and that there was no such entity within the government of the "NKR." He did not provide us with

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information on cross-border smuggling, and asserted that there was no traffic across the border between the occupied territories and Iran.

17. (C) There is no border between Armenia and the occupied territories. Any Armenian with a car or truck can drive, without a cargo check, from the occupied territories into Armenia and vice versa.

Comment

18. (C) This is a serious issue, and one which cannot be addressed fully until there is at least a partial solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. We have no way to verify whether Armenia is controlling the border as it asserts, just as we have no way to confirm or dismiss inflammatory allegations of cross-border trafficking/proliferation of illicit materials.

GODFREY